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1

Portchester Castle

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NOTE BY PROFESSOR CUNLIFFE

'Since 1967 when the first edition of this booklet was published, excavations have continued on a large scale bringing to light much that is new. Two interim summary reports have been published: Excavations at Portchester Castle, Hants, 1966-68, *Antiquaries Journal*, XLIX (1969), 62-74; and The Saxon Culture Sequence at Portchester Castle, *Antiquaries Journal*, L (1970), 67-85.

It has therefore been decided to reprint the text of this paper without alteration. In the event of a further edition, certain sections may be re-written in the light of further research.'

Portchester Castle, standing on the tip of a promontory projecting into the upper reaches of Portsmouth Harbour (*plate 1*), is a structure remarkable not only for the drama of its situation and preservation but also for the considerable length of time during which this 20-acre peninsula was utilized by man (*figs. 1 and 2*). Throughout its life the site has fluctuated many times from being a military establishment of national importance to becoming a safe residence for a few individuals. Its fabric and the soil around it contain this story. The remains can be studied in many ways, as a purely archaeological problem, as an architectural development, or simply as the physical manifestation of a copious documentary history. The archaeological work has only just begun and cannot yet be used as a total basis for description, but the architectural aspect has been recently summarized in some detail in the Official Guide, and the main lines of the documentary evidence have been set out in the first volume of *The History of the Kings Works*. Therefore in this present short account I have made an attempt to combine the evidence at present available to us in a narrative which, I hope, will bring out the way the function of the site determined the structures to be built there, and how these in turn controlled its subsequent usefulness. The story offered here is therefore one which shows the relationship between an environment and human needs.

In an account of this type I have necessarily omitted much and have seldom been able to quote the detail upon which many of the generalizations are based. For this the reader is referred to the works listed in the bibliography and, of course, to the monument itself. Anyone comparing the old Official Guide Book with this description will become aware of the enormous advance in knowledge which excavation has made possible. Not only have our ideas of the Roman and Saxon periods been transformed, but substantial contributions have been made to the better documented Medieval and later periods. Excavations began in 1961 and have continued annually since then. Our first aim was to excavate the Roman walls, gates, bastions and ditches in sufficient detail to be able to understand the form and function of the defensive circuit. This was completed within the first three years. Attention was then turned to the interior of the defended area, three-quarters of which are now occupied by a castle, a churchyard and a cricket pitch. The fourth, the south-west quarter, is open and it is here that area-excavation began. Annually about 1,500 sq. ft. are being excavated, little compared with what has to be done but large when measured by

PORTCHESTER CASTLE

Professor Barry Cunliffe

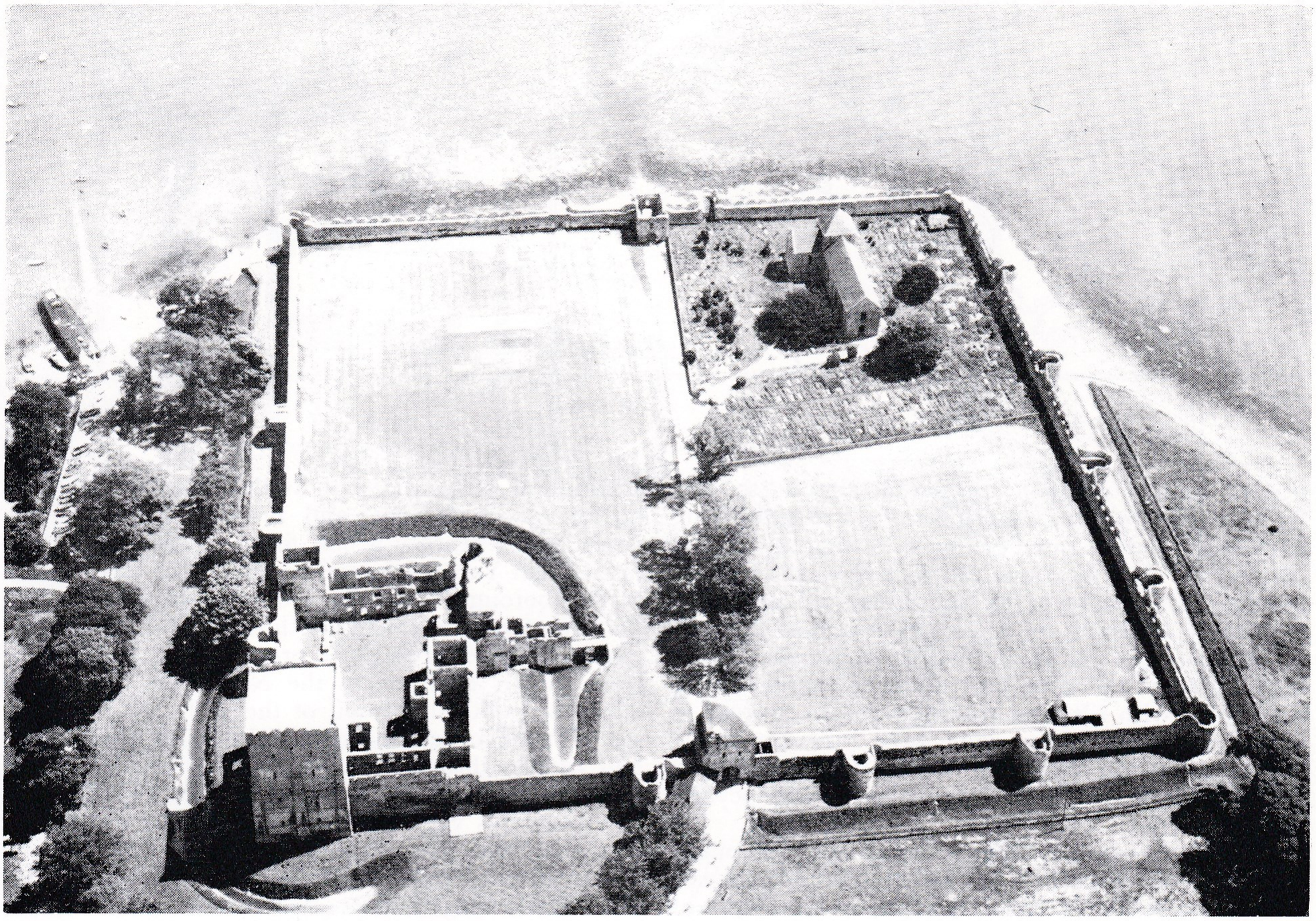


PLATE I *Air view of the castle from the west.*

effort and cost. In this way we hope systematically to strip a reasonable percentage of the available area, and thus to enable the history of the sample to be traced in detail. Whilst this work is continuing trial excavations are being undertaken within the Inner Bailey to examine the structural history of the upstanding Medieval nucleus, but digging here must be regulated so as not to interfere with the needs of visitors.

The excavations, upon which the following description relies so heavily, are being carried out with the permission and active co-operation of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. They have been made possible by grants from the Society of Antiquaries, the Haverfield Trustees, the Hampshire Field Club, the Joint Archaeological Committee and the Museum and Libraries Committee of the Portsmouth City Corporation. It is hoped that work will continue for many years to come and that the fine collection of archaeological material, which is quickly being amassed, will soon be put on display in Portsmouth's new museum.

The first traces of occupation to be found on the Portchester promontory belong to the second half of the first century A.D., but there is little yet to suggest the nature of this early settlement, all that survives being a small quantity of pottery, together with a few stake-holes and post-holes.[1] The remains are sugges-

[1] *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. XLVI (1966), fig. 2 and p. 43.

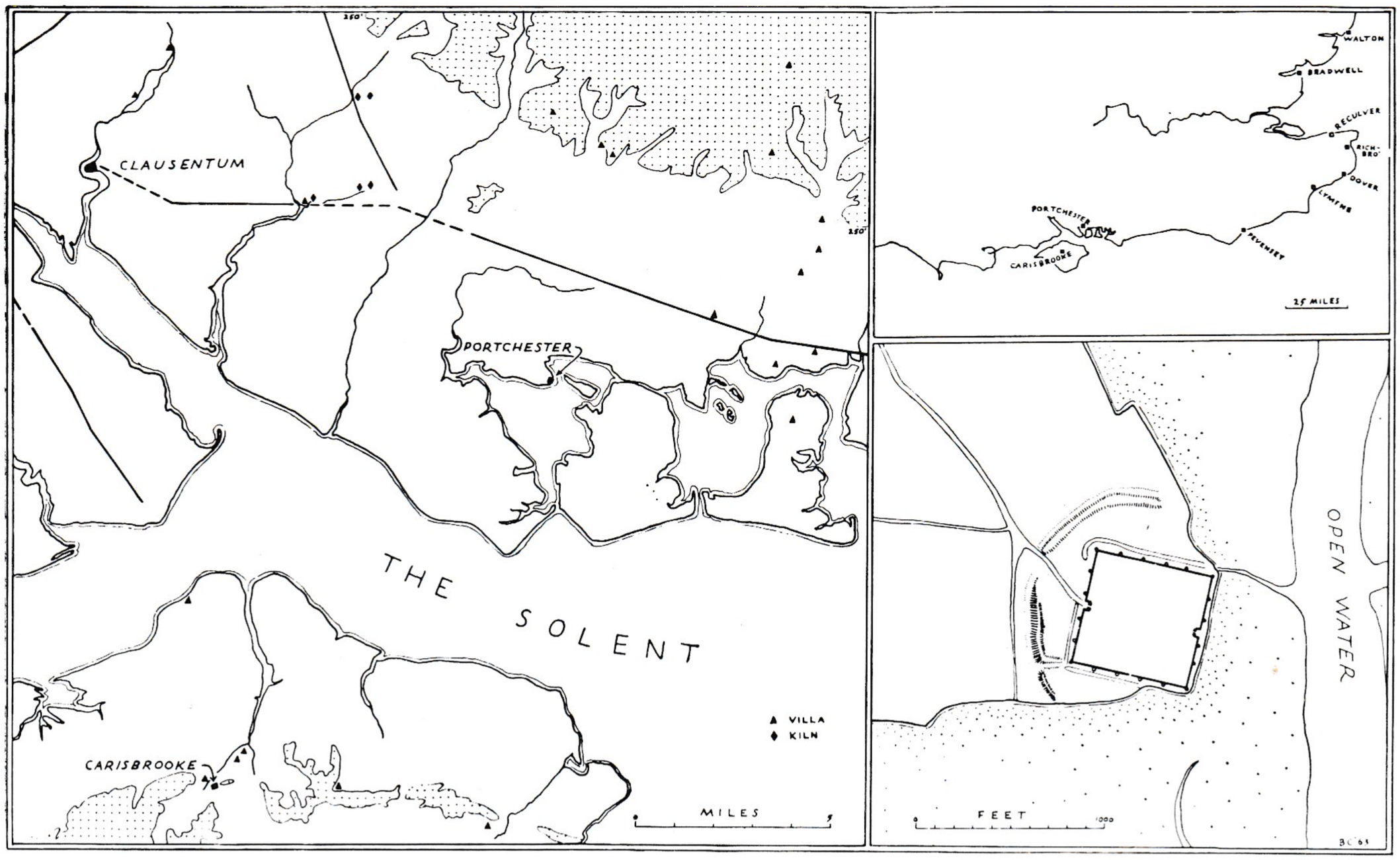


FIG. I

tive of limited peasant occupation similar to that found elsewhere along the fringes of the neighbouring harbours. There is some evidence to suggest that the sea level of that time was more or less as it is now, but the configuration of the coastline would have been noticeably different. It is well known that in more recent times the sea has eroded large stretches of the land, whilst at the same time the deep channels have been filled with silt, and marshy shallows, gradually colonized by vegetation, have been built up in the lee of the islands. What Portsmouth Harbour looked like in the first century A.D. is, in detail, beyond recovery.

The relative sea-level appears to have risen throughout the second and third centuries, making the coast land unattractive for settlers and, so far as we can at present tell, gradually driving the local inhabitants to drier ground further inland. Portchester, being a slight hillock, would have stood out even above the highest tide as a firm dry promontory and as such it would have attracted the attention of the military surveyors who, in the late third century, would have been examining the coast for potential fort sites.

Before describing the military structures which they were to build, it is necessary to say something of the political background which made fortification desirable.[2] The Fleet, the *Classis Britannica*, had been in Britain from the time of the invasion of A.D. 43 in which it had played an essential part. By the second century several naval detachments were stationed at harbours around the channel coasts stretching from Dover to Pevensey, and supported by similar bases on the adjacent French shore. In the early years of the third century it would seem that troubles in the North Sea caused this system to be extended north by the addition of substantial forts built in similar positions at Reculver, in Kent, and Brancaster in Norfolk. Later in the century a new fort was built at Burgh, near Great Yarmouth, and a signal post was erected at Richborough to aid the protection of the Channel ports. So far, then, it looks as though the third century coastal defences grew up to protect the British shores from raiders confined to the North Sea. However, after the political turmoil of the 270's the situation seems to have deteriorated, and by 285 the pirates had broken through the Straits of Dover and were raiding the land on both sides of the English Channel. It was in this year that a Belgian sailor, Carausius, was given the task of ridding the shores of 'Belgica and Armorica' of pirates.[3] In the following year he was to rebel against Rome and set himself up as Emperor of Britain – a title which, because of the weakness of the central government, he managed to retain until he was murdered by his assistant Allectus in 293.

This is the background to the construction of the Roman fort at Portchester, but the marrying of these historical events to the archaeological facts is by no means easy. Two coins, one of Saloninus (253–259) and one of Gallienus (253–268), both found in primary contexts, suggest that the walls of Portchester were probably erected some time after A.D. 268, furthermore a quantity of Carausian issues demonstrate that the fort was first intensively occupied at this time. This is as far as the archaeo-

[2] The development of Roman shore defences has been set out in detail by the present writer in a section entitled 'The British Fleet' in B. W. Cunliffe (ed.), *Fifth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent* (forthcoming).

[3] Eutropius IX, 21.

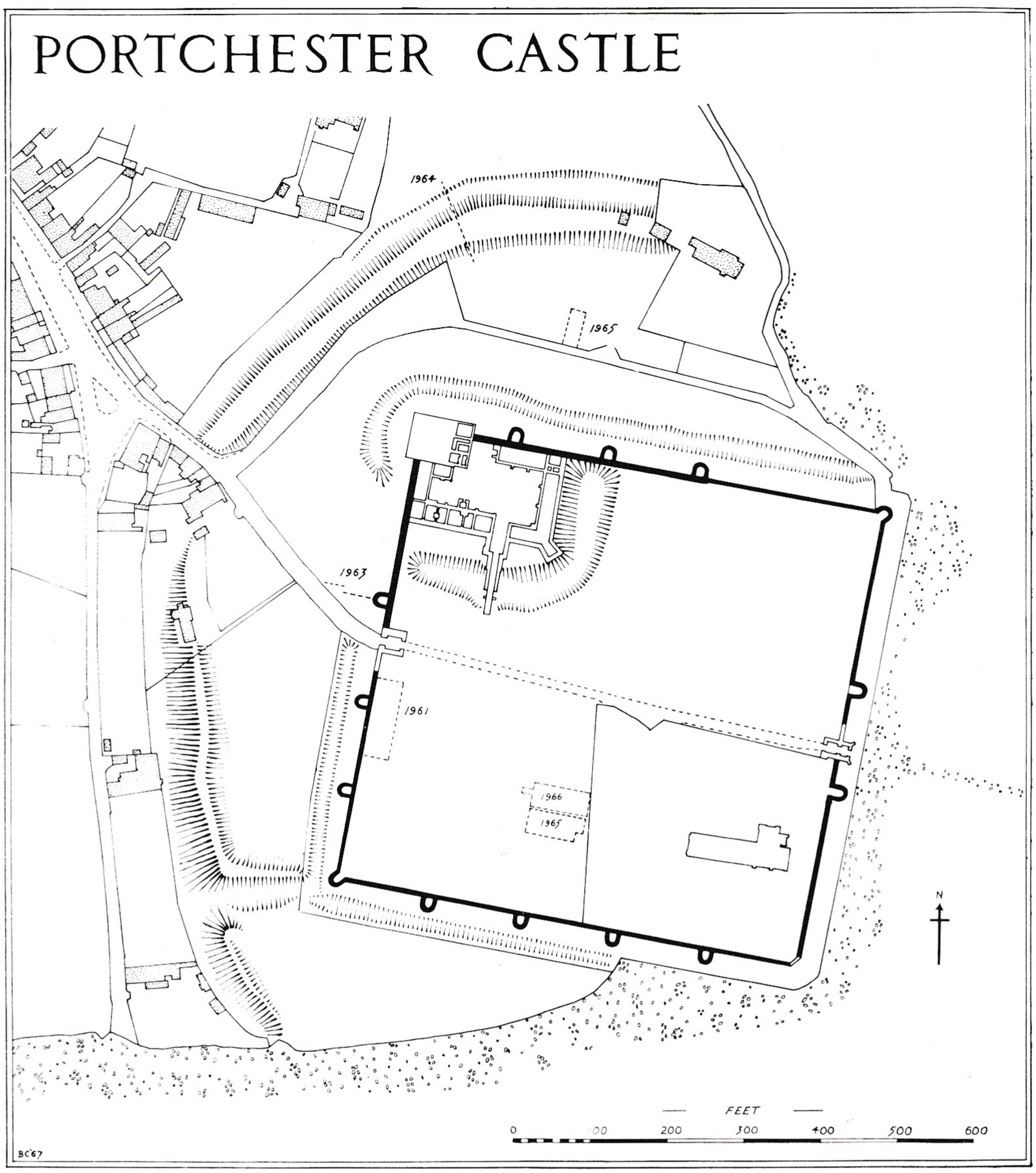


FIG. 2

logical evidence allows us to go with certainty. It is, however, reasonable to suppose on the present showing that Portchester was probably built by Carausius. The question then arises: was it built in 285 against barbarian pirates, or after 286 against the threat of re-conquest by the Roman central authorities?[4] To this there can be no certain answer, both possibilities present reasonable contexts, both can be argued against. Here it is sufficient to say that the present writer inclines to the view that the fort was built before the illegal regime took over, but if by Carausius, who is to say what was in his mind when construction began.

Portchester was not the only new fort put up at this time; similar structures were erected to replace obsolete establishments at Lympne and Richborough, both in Kent. Occupation continued on the earlier sites mentioned above, and it might well be that other forts were built, perhaps along the south coast, of which nothing is yet known. In short, by the mid 280's the British coast was garrisonned from the Wash to the Solent.

The Carausian forts all differ in detail but Portchester exhibits most of the features typical of the class, and because of its magnificent state of preservation it is worth considering in some detail. The most dramatic feature of the fort today, as indeed it would have been in the Roman period, is the massive defensive wall 10 ft. thick and originally 20 ft. or more in height, surrounding an area of 9 acres. The wall is constructed of coursed flint laid in thick beds of mortar, with its outer face bonded to the core by courses of tiles or of limestone slabs. It is a sobering thought that 24,000 cu. yds. of flint and mortar were

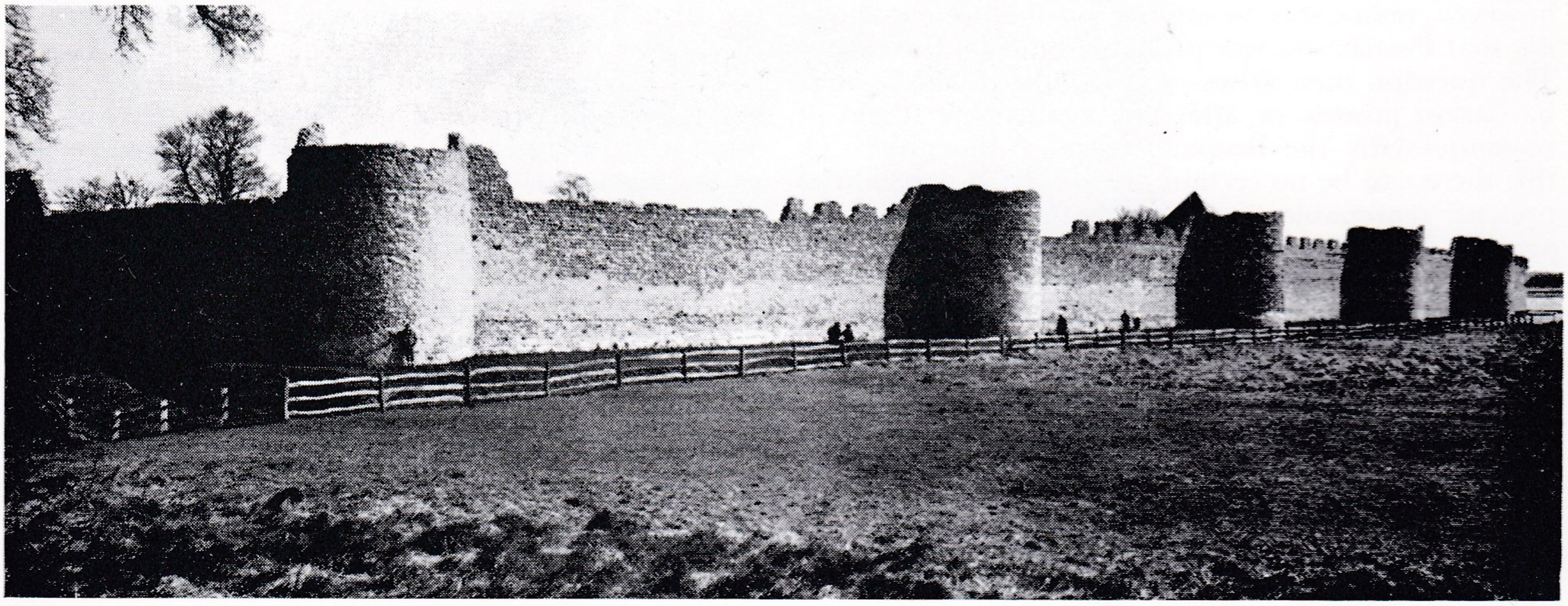
[4] For a description of this period see: D. Atkinson, 'Classis Britannica', *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait* (1933), 7–10; D. A. White, *Litus Saxonicum* (1961), 19–32; R. A. G. Carson, *Journal of the Brit. Arch. Ass.*, vol. xxii (1959), 33–40.

PLATE II *Detail of the inner face of the Roman wall, showing the join between the work of two Roman construction gangs.*

used in the superstructure alone, all of which would have had to have been laboriously carted to the site. The method of construction is clear: after a foundation 12–14 ft. wide had been prepared a bed of mortar was spread, and on this was placed a close-packed layer of flint nodules. Then followed another seating of mortar, and the process was repeated until the wall reached its required height. At several places it was even possible to see the impressions in the soft mortar of the hob-nailed boots worn by the Roman masons laying the flints. If the wall had risen in height quickly there would have been a tendency for the sides to bulge and perhaps collapse. To obviate this a system of shuttering seems to have been employed which entailed laying poles at regular intervals through the thickness of the wall, as the wall was built. The ends of these poles, projecting beyond the wall faces, could then have been used to secure timber shuttering, which would have kept the masonry rigid until natural drying had consolidated the entire mass. The shuttering could then have been taken down and the projecting ends of the poles sawn off flush with the wall face. Eventually the poles rotted, leaving voids which can still be seen today. Massive baulks of crossed timbers were also laid within the foundations but the function of these, found in most of the other shore forts, is less clear. It may be that they were to give a unity and resilience to a structure which might otherwise have been liable to differential subsidence and cracking. One further detail emerges: the wall was built in separate sections by different gangs of workmen, each gang being responsible for a length of about 120 ft. In some cases the vertical junction between the work of the two different construction parties is visible (*plate II*).

From the front face of the wall projected a series of regularly-spaced D-shaped bastions (*plate III* and *IV*), built at the same time as the wall and bonded to it. They were hollow and several of them were provided

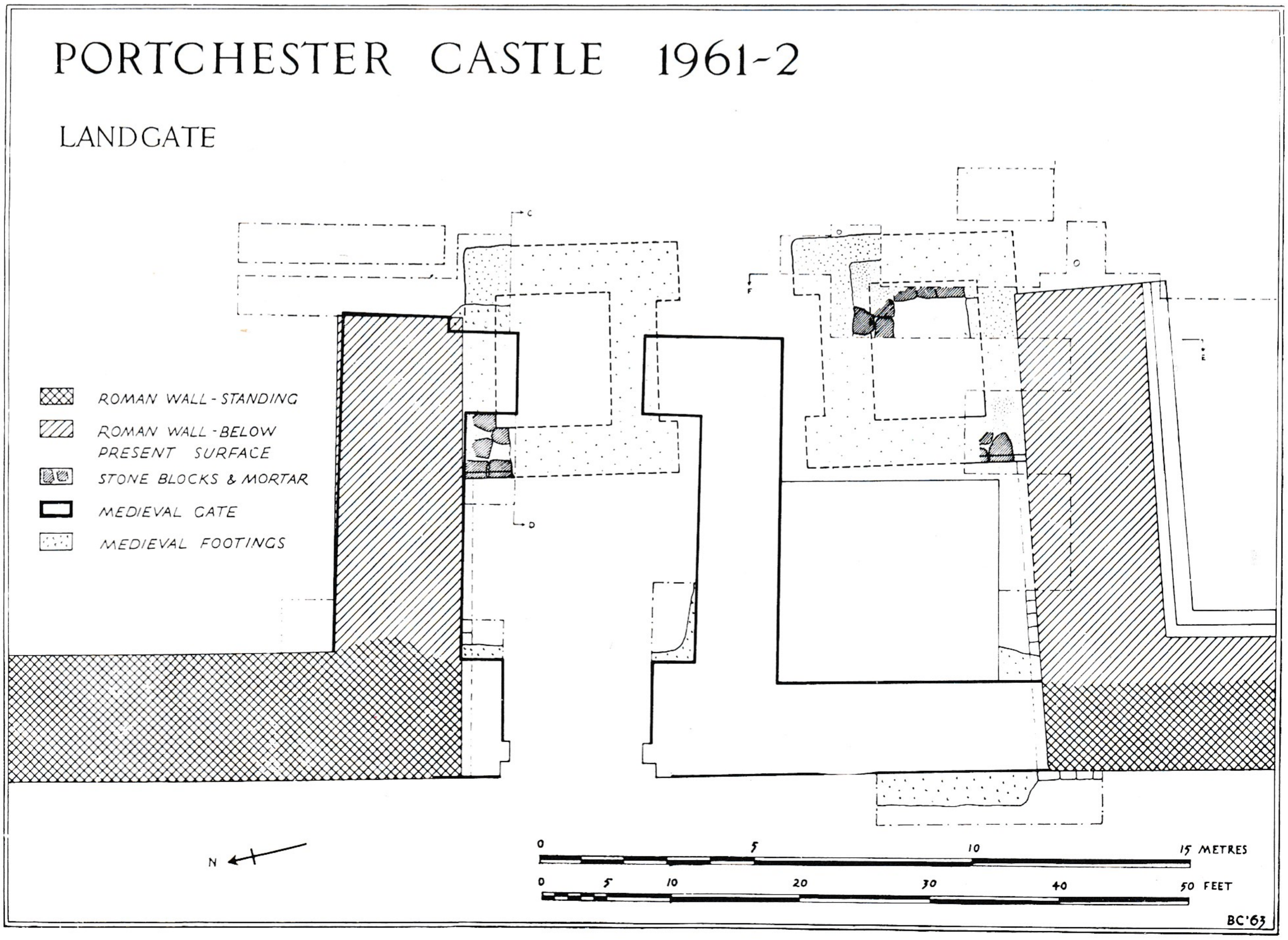
PLATE III *The South wall of the Roman fort with D-shaped projecting bastions.*



with a ground-level drain to allow any rain water, which might have accumulated inside, to run off. It seems probable that they were all floored across at parapet level with a timber platform, upon which would have stood a piece of artillery, probably a ballista. From the top of each bastion it would therefore have been possible to fire on anyone approaching the wall – there were no blind spots. Forward ballista platforms of this kind were a relatively late innovation; previously, as in for example the first-century fort at Hod Hill in Dorset, these *ballistaria* were built behind the defences. A forward position has obvious tactical advantages, and Portchester, together with its contemporary forts, must have been the first example of this new style of military architecture to appear in Britain apart from town gates. For such a defensive method to be really efficient is was necessary to keep any would-be attackers within the most effective killing range – usually between 80 and 150 ft. from the wall. At Porchester this was accomplished simply by digging a pair of V-shaped ditches skirting the wall as an obstacle to frontal attack. In later stage of development, not represented at Portchester, the place of the double ditch system was taken by a single, wide flat-bottomed ditch, but its function was the same.

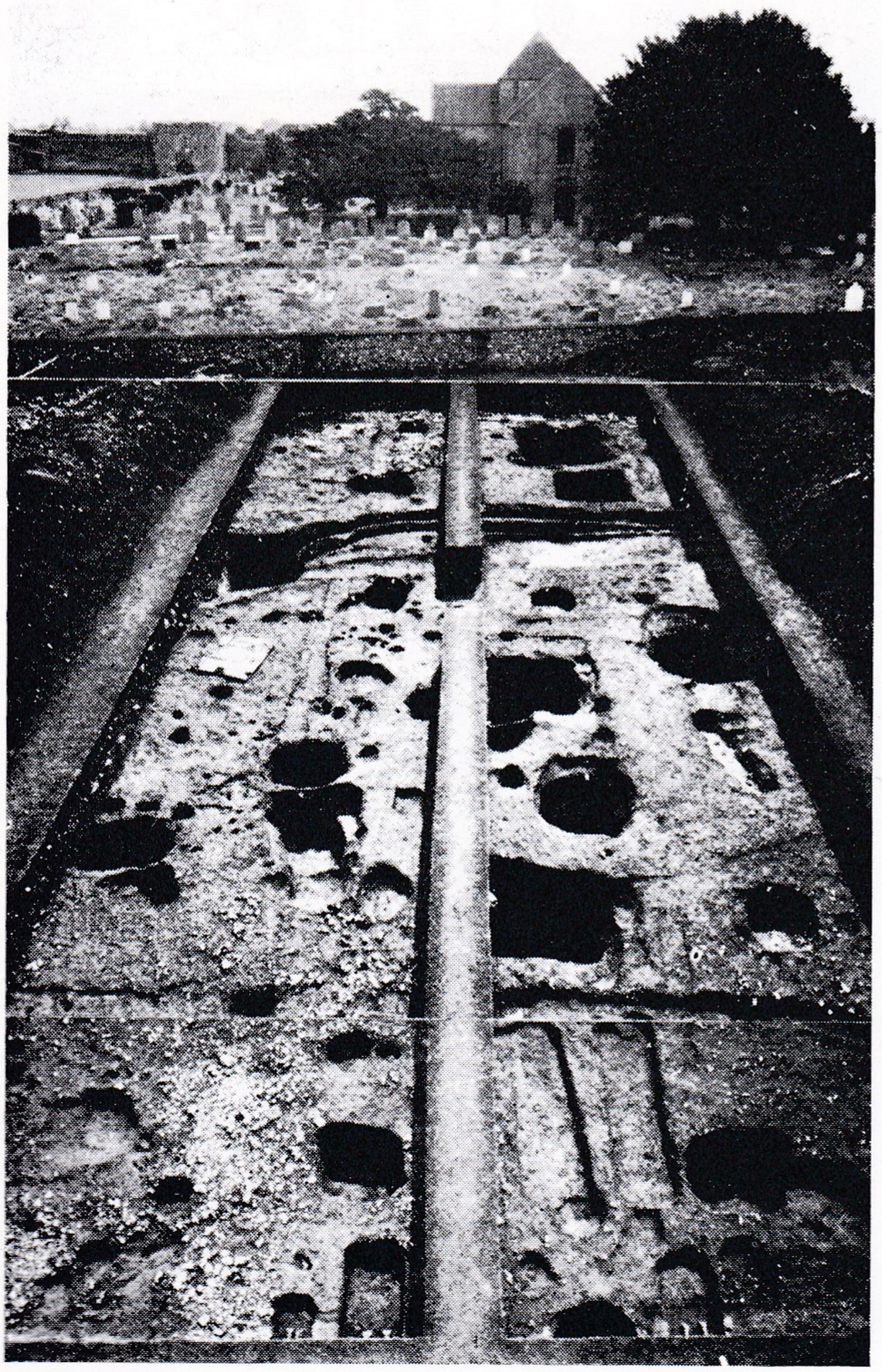
In the centres of the east and west walls (now beneath the Medieval Land and Water gates) were two massively-defended Roman gates (*figs. 3 and 4*), each created by inturning the curtain wall for a

FIG. 3



Left PLATE IV *A well-preserved Roman bastion on the north wall.*

Below PLATE V *General view of the* 1966 *excavations. The large pits in the centre belong to the Roman latrine; shallow graves of early-Medieval date can be seen in the foreground.*



distance of about 37 ft. and building across the end of the courtyard thus formed the gate proper consisting, in ground plan, of two guard-houses flanking a 10-ft. wide entrance road, which would have been arched across to take an upper storey. The masonry of the gates was largely of Upper Greensand, a stone which the later medieval builders removed almost completely for their work elsewhere in the castle, leaving only the foundation mortar undisturbed. Fortunately this was sufficient to enable us to plan in detail the Roman gate, even to the extent of showing the recesses into which the gates themselves hinged back when opened. The east and west gates were the main gates of the fort, but two smaller gates existed in the centres of the north and south walls. These were little more than simple arched openings, 10 ft. wide, which would have served, in times of emergency, as sally-ports, allowing members of the garrison to get out onto the berm to repel any attackers who may have managed to cross the ditches.

This, then, was the defensive system of the Carausian fort, up-to-date, massive and virtually impregnable, but what of the structures inside? Of these we are still largely ignorant, but the systematic excavation of the enclosed area is gradually filling in the details (*plate V*). First, however, it is necessary to say something of the arrangements of the other forts of this series. At Lympne, excavations in the middle of the last century brought to light two masonry buildings one of which can reasonably be interpreted as the offices of the *principia* (the headquarters building), the other being a small bath suite belonging to the garrison, or at least its officers.[5] The nearby fort at Richborough produced a closely similar bath building and also the remains of what was probably the *principia*. Elsewhere within the defended area no masonry buildings of this date were discovered, but traces of timber structures, possibly barrack buildings, were partly recorded in one area.[6] To this all too limited picture we might expect Portchester to be similar, but neither *principia* nor bath suite have yet been found. The area excavations in the south-west quarter of the fort have, however, shown an orderly arrangement of roads and timber buildings. The fort was divided into quarters by 10-ft. wide roads running between the gates, and a considerable length of that which runs from the south postern towards the centre of the fort has now been examined; at one

[5] C. Roach Smith, *The Roman Castrum at Lymne* (1852), 19 and 21.
[6] For a summary of the Carausian fort at Richborough, see B. W. Cunliffe (ed.), *op. cit.*

PORTCHESTER CASTLE 1962-3

WATERGATE

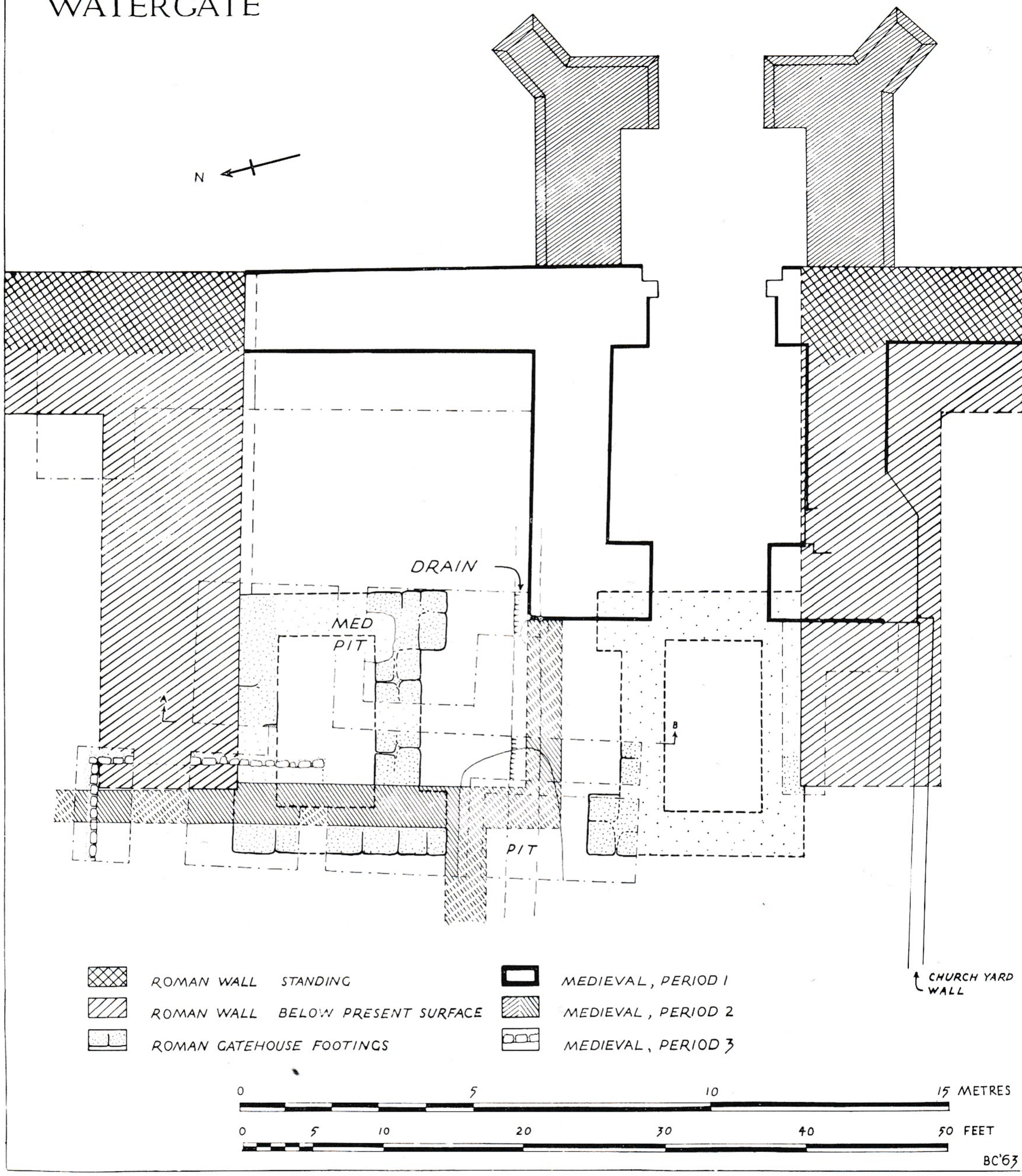


FIG. 4

point an east-west road was found to join it. Along these street frontages were erected timber buildings constructed on a system of sill beams – that is beams laid horizontally on the ground-surface to take the superstructure. The beams have now completely rotted but the outlines of most of the buildings can be traced and their internal features, such as hearths and ovens, can be planned. It is too early to say for what all these buildings were used – more of their plans will need to be recovered first, but the ovens suggest some form of domestic activity. The function of one room is however quite clear – it was a large latrine containing cesspits – each with post-holes near by to take the timber seating above. The pits would have been emptied regularly, but when finally the latrine was abandoned they were filled with rubbish, consisting mostly of animal bones and broken pottery.

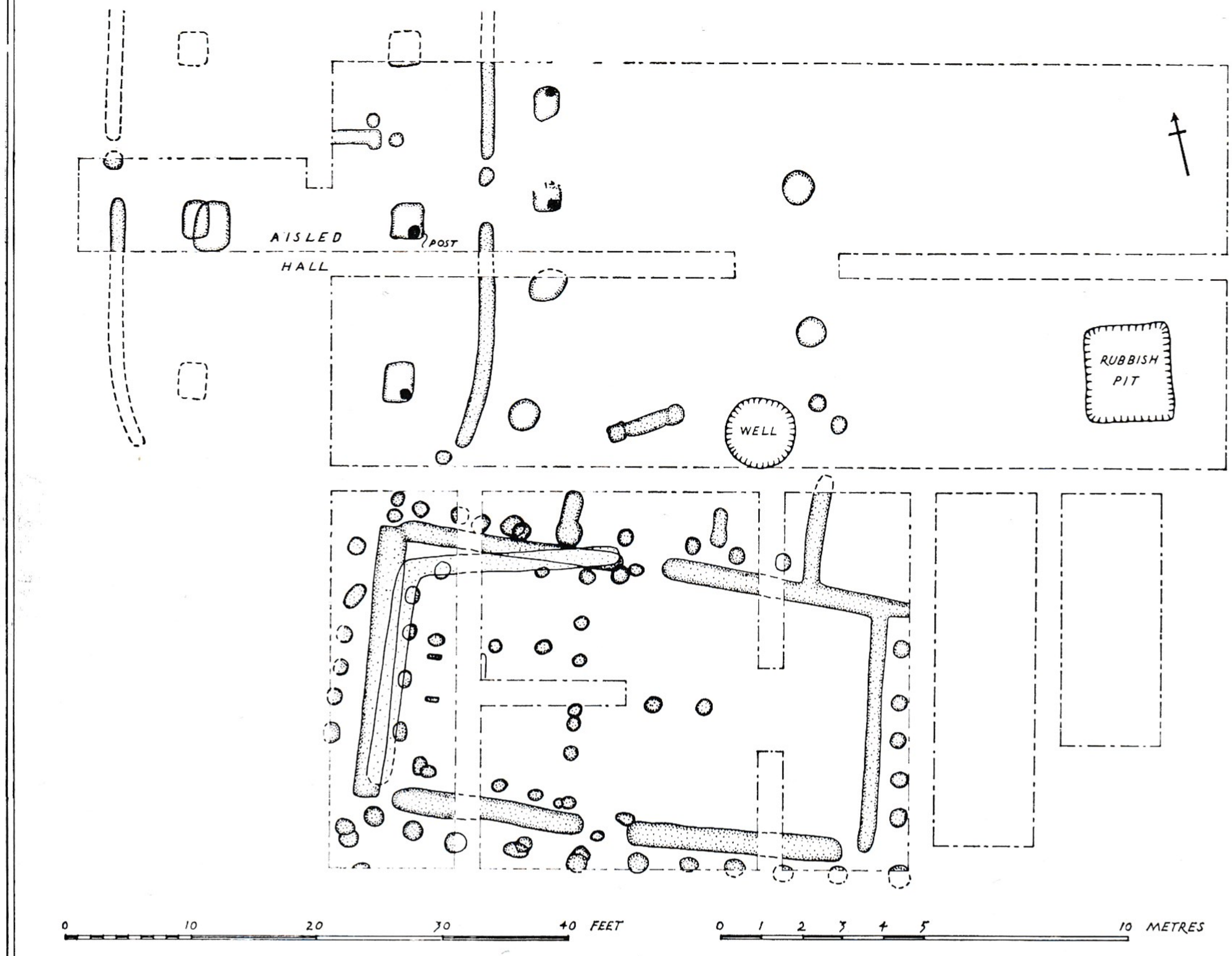


FIG. 5

The Carausian episode ended in 296 when the illegal regime, now led by Allectus, was destroyed by Constantius Chlorus who restored Britain once more to the Roman empire. Portchester, together with several other forts, shows signs of abandonment, or at least a drastic reduction in garrison, at this time and they do not appear to be reoccupied on a large scale until about 340. Admittedly, this view is at present based only on the interpretation of the limited coin evidence, but it would fit well with the politics of the times for Constantius, made painfully aware of the strength of the shore forts by Carausius, would surely have reduced the size of the garrisons to a safe number when Britain was reconquered, otherwise a new usurper might make use of them again. That he was able to do this is an indication that the seas were temporarily clear of pirates.[7] Renewed activity appears some time in the late 330's or 340's when the shore forts seem to have been reorganized and the internal buildings repaired or modified. It was at this time that a completely new fort was built at Pevensey to fill in an awkward gap in the system. The implication is that the pirates were becoming troublesome again, and it might well have been the Emperor Constans, who visited Britain in the winter of 342, who initiated these changes. At Portchester the archaeological evidence shows that at about this time the roads were remetalled and there are some traces of new timber buildings, although firm and accurate dating evidence for these activities is not yet available. Portchester exhibits another peculiarity which might belong to this period – the presence of women, for there can be little reasonable doubt that the discovery of bracelets, brooches, hair-pins and several burials of immature infants imply that women lived in the fort, presumably as the families of the garrison troops. Such an arrangement – a peasant militia – is well known on the Hadrianic frontier in the period after 370, but at Portchester it must be earlier.

The rubbish deposits from within the fort provide us with many details of garrison life – animal bones, for instance, show that cattle carcasses were butchered on the spot, the lower limbs and the poleaxed heads being disposed of in pits. Pigs' brains, on the other hand, were probably eaten, for skulls neatly split in two are sometimes found. Mutton seems to have been popular, although large quantities of beef and pork were consumed as well. The meat diet was supple-

[7] Probably the garrison along the French coast (in easy reach of the Central Government) was sufficient to control the pirate problem. Unfortunately we know practically nothing of the French sites.

mented by occasional venison and birds, and by quantities of shellfish. Not a great deal is known of the cereals eaten, but some wheat grains were found in 1966 and the presence of ovens implies baking on the spot. And finally, there were the cats and dogs scavenging among the rubbish pits, hunting rats and perhaps sleeping in the timber huts at night – a picture of tolerably comfortable domesticity.

It is impossible similarly to reconstruct the daily life of the fighting men from the archaeological evidence, but literary sources give some indication of what it must have been like. The primary function of the garrison seems to have been to act as a kind of sedentary marine commando unit prepared to embark in ships and drive off pirates when they were sighted, or to go by land to any point where a raiding-party may have come ashore. Perhaps two separate units, one naval and one cavalry, were involved. Anyway both sea and road connections were essential and Portchester is admirably served by both.

The end of the military occupation of the site came in about A.D. 370. Three years earlier hoards of barbarians, acting in concert, had attacked Britain and had caused chaos south to the Thames. In 368 Count Theodosius was sent to restore order and gradually, by a process of buying off the dissidents and completely reorganizing the coastal defences he managed to create a temporary peace. Most of the shore forts show clear signs of the Theodosian activity, but at Portchester there are none. In fact the coin series ends abruptly in about 370. The implication must be that military occupation here ceased at the time of the reorganization. But the Solent was not left undefended, for a new fort was built at *Clausentum*,[8] on a promontory projecting into the upper reaches of Southampton Water. Why it was thought necessary to move the base from Portchester to the new site is not immediately apparent, but it may well be that difficulty was experienced at certain tides in sailing out of Portsmouth Harbour, particularly under adverse wind conditions: Clausentum was better situated for easy movement.[9]

The history of the site in the remaining 40 years or so of the Roman era is obscure, but it is highly unlikely that it was ever completely abandoned. The old timber buildings would have afforded some protection for would-be inhabitants and the presence of a single coin of Arcadius (395–408) shows that the site was still in use or visited in the early years of the fifth century. Unfortunately no trace of structures belonging to this period has yet been identified, but in 1966 evidence suggesting that the area inside the fort had been ploughed came to light in the form of several parallel furrows cutting into the Roman layers. Whether this activity took place in the immediate sub-Roman period or slightly later remains obscure, but it can safely be assigned to the fifth or sixth century. It may be that structures of sub-Roman date will come to light when other parts of the defended area are excavated – until then we must remain ignorant.

In 501, so the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says, Port landed at Portsmouth and fought a battle with a noble Briton, whom he killed.[10] We clearly cannot accept this statement as the exact truth but it is, no doubt, based on a vague memory of a late fifth- or early sixth-century landing somewhere in the Portsmouth region. A further implication, that there was sub-Roman resistance, is inescapable. It is possible that a landing of this kind took place at Portchester which would in any event have been an ideal place to organize a resistance group. It may be relevant that a similar Saxon landing followed by a massacre of the local defenders is said to have taken place at the neighbouring shore fort of Pevensey.

The recent excavations at Portchester have produced clear evidence of Saxon occupation in the form of typical Saxon pottery, made distinctive by its tempering of chopped grass or straw. Much of it is plain and difficult to date, but some pieces are decorated with stamped rosettes and raised bosses which, on present evidence, are usually dated to the late fifth or early sixth century. In one place a pit was found containing a few sherds of this kind, together with a piece of a human arm-bone (*humerus*) scarred by a sword or knife cut. It is tempting to associate these finds with the legendary landing of Port, but to do so would be to go beyond the limits of evidence, if not of reason. Early Saxon pottery has now been found in three separate parts of the fort: against the west wall, in the centre, and in the south-west quarter. Such a distribution must imply intensive occupation, and when it is remembered that occupation sites of this period are extremely rare the significance of Portchester becomes more

[8] M. A. Cotton and P. W. Gathercole, *Excavations at Clausentum, Southampton 1951–54* (1958), but see I. A. Richmond, *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. iii (1962), 271–2, for a re-interpretation of the so-called 'palisade'.

[9] I have not attempted to discuss here the problem of whether Portchester is the *Portus Adurni* mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. The problem is beset with complex obscurities and has been examined in some detail in B. W. Cunliffe (ed.), *op. cit.*, where I conclude that this could have been the name of Portchester in the period 342–369.

[10] D. Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 11.

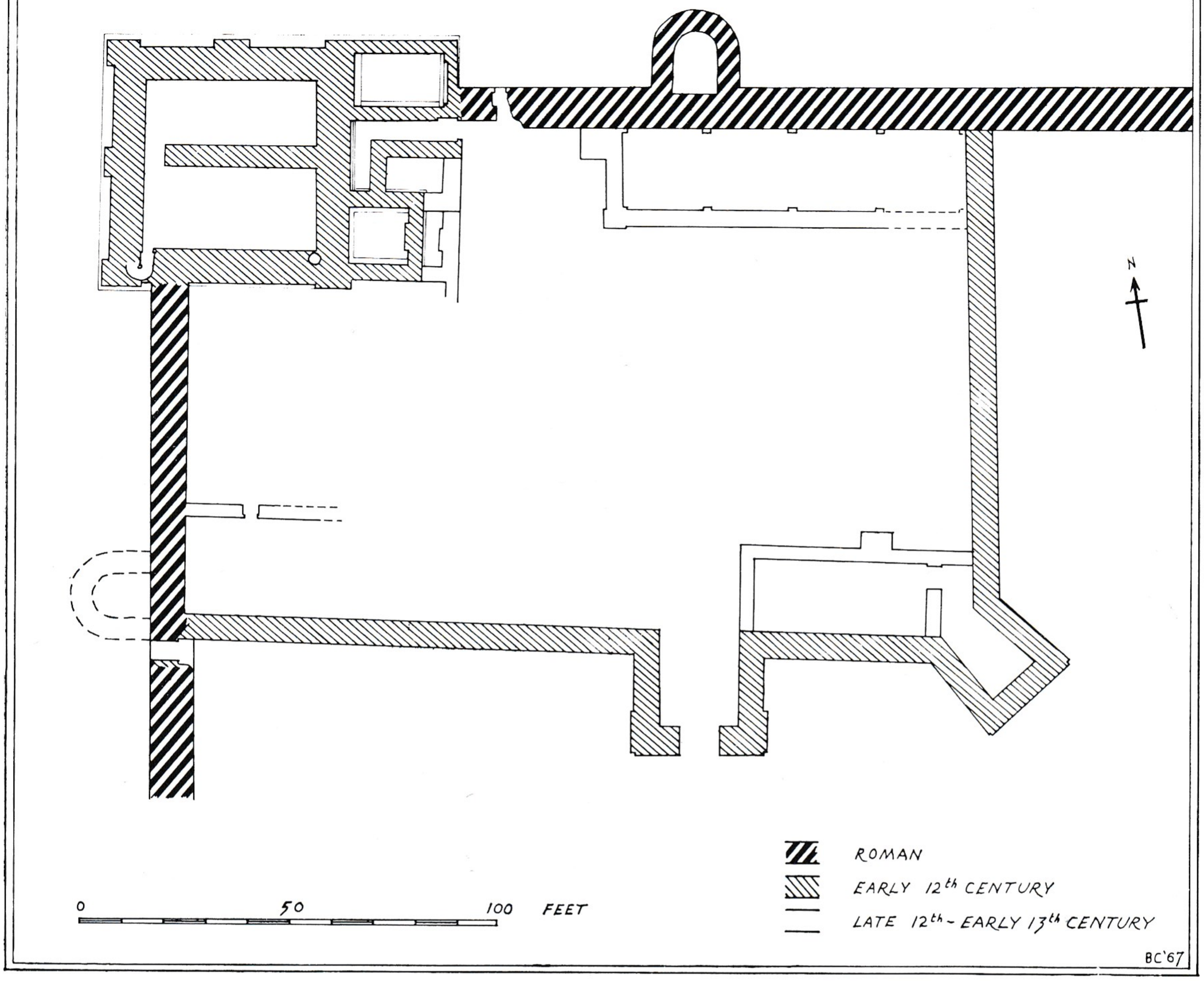


FIG. 6

apparent. As the excavation expands it should be possible to distinguish buildings of this date. Part of one has already been found in the south-west quarter of the fort, but much more remains to be done before anything complete can emerge.

One of the problems of grass-tempered pottery is that it seems to have remained in use from the fifth to the ninth century with little apparent change. Some of the Portchester pottery, as we have said, is of the fifth-sixth century; other pieces should on typological grounds be assigned to the eighth or ninth century. What happened in between we cannot yet tell, but there may well have been continuous occupation.

Structures of the eighth-ninth century came to light in the excavation of 1965 in the south-west quarter of the fort, almost due west of the church door. Here two rows of post holes at right-angles to each other were found, which might possibly have held the wall-posts of a rectangular building about 18 ft. wide. Just beyond its north-west corner were found two rectangular pits. One had been used as a cess-pit and after it had gone out of use it had been sealed in by a thick capping of clay. The second pit had been used for the disposal of domestic rubbish, and into it had been thrown enormous quantities of shells, mainly of oyster, mussel and winkle. Mixed up with these, towards the bottom, was an almost complete pot made in grass-tempered ware probably dating to about the ninth century. A third pit, found in 1966, a little to the north, was even more important for it contained, in addition to a number of grass-tempered sherds, a few body sherds of vessels tempered with crushed flint grit. It is probable that by as early as the tenth century this grit-tempered ware had replaced the earlier grass-tempered type, and therefore the Portchester pit would seem to be transitional between the two traditions.

From the fifth to the tenth century there is no documentary evidence relating to Portchester and our knowledge of its development must of necessity be derived solely from the archaeological evidence, but from the tenth century onwards records began to appear in increasing numbers to make the task of interpretation easier. In the early tenth century Southern Britain was threatened by Viking attacks. To repel these a number of sites, many of them already surrounded by Roman walls, were re-fortified and turned into defended settlements (*burhs*) protected by a semicivilian militia – a method of defence closely similar to that employed in the period 342–369. Portchester was one of these burhs and is listed as such in the early-tenth-century document known as the 'Burghal Hidage'.[11] Two things are suggested: first that the Roman defences were in a good state of repair, and second that some of the garrison at least was probably living within the defended area. Now all the evidence at present available argues that not only were the Roman walls standing at this time, but that the Landgate and the two postern gates were substantially intact; the problem of the Watergate is more difficult. Structurally the now existing gatehouse is quite different from the twelfth-century building put up over the remains of the Roman Landgate, and indeed its simple arch ornamented with alternate iron-stone voussoirs (*plate VI*) has led one writer to suggest that it was Roman.[12] That this was not so was shown by the excavation of 1963, in which the foundations of this gate were found to seal the remains of the destroyed Roman structure. The Watergate, then, is post-Roman and quite possibly pre-twelfth century. The present writer inclines to the view that it was, in fact, a late-Saxon erection put up in the tenth century to repair a breach formed in the old Roman defences, perhaps by the undercutting action of the sea. Some support for this view is provided by the very similar arch in the tower of Titchfield Church near by, which is generally regarded as being of late-Saxon origin.

At any event, the Roman walls would have formed an excellent defensive work for the tenth-century militia to man, but there is a further problem – was the great earthwork, which cut off the promontory upon which the castle stands, part of the late Saxon defences? It could be argued that such a line was an unnecessary addition, but this applies equally to any period. The problem has not yet been solved; all that can safely be said, on the basis of the section cut through it, is that the earthwork is post-Roman and that the few sherds of pottery found beneath it could

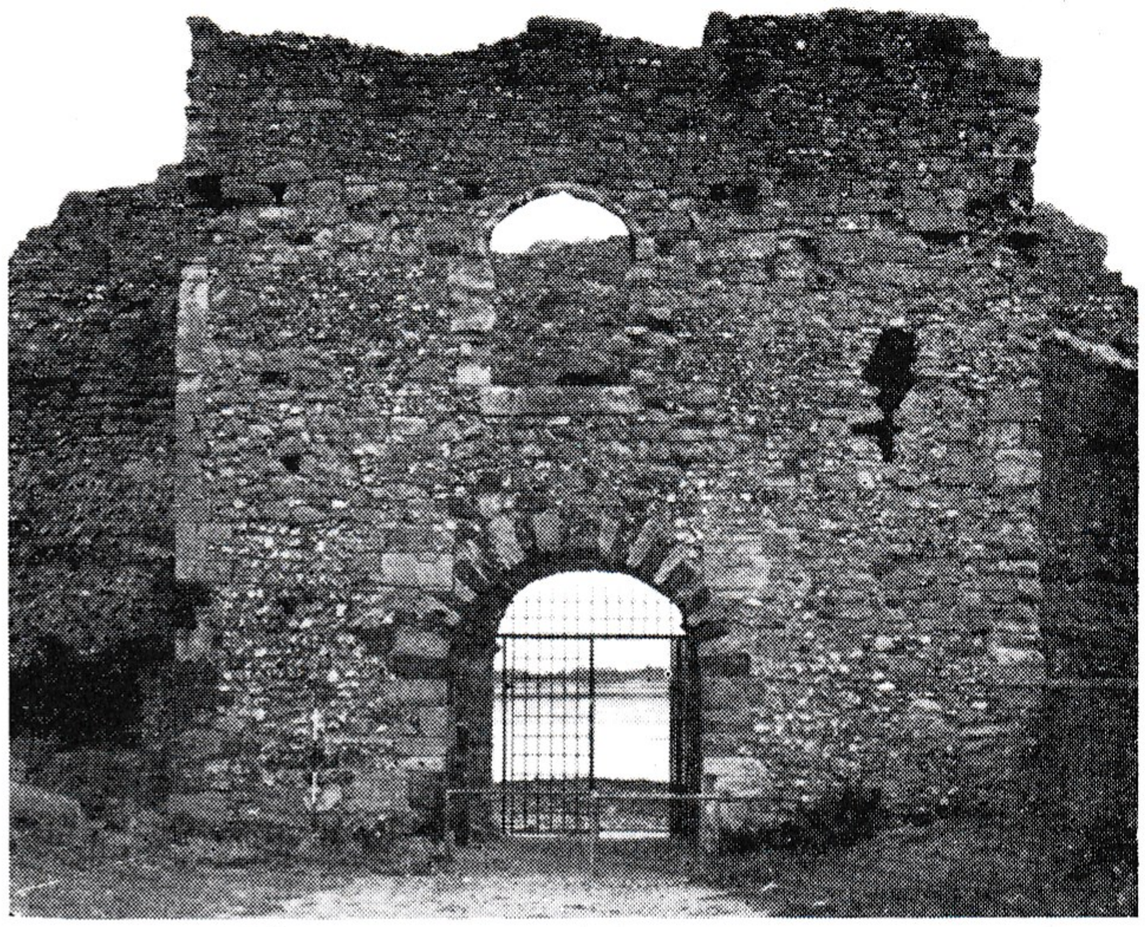
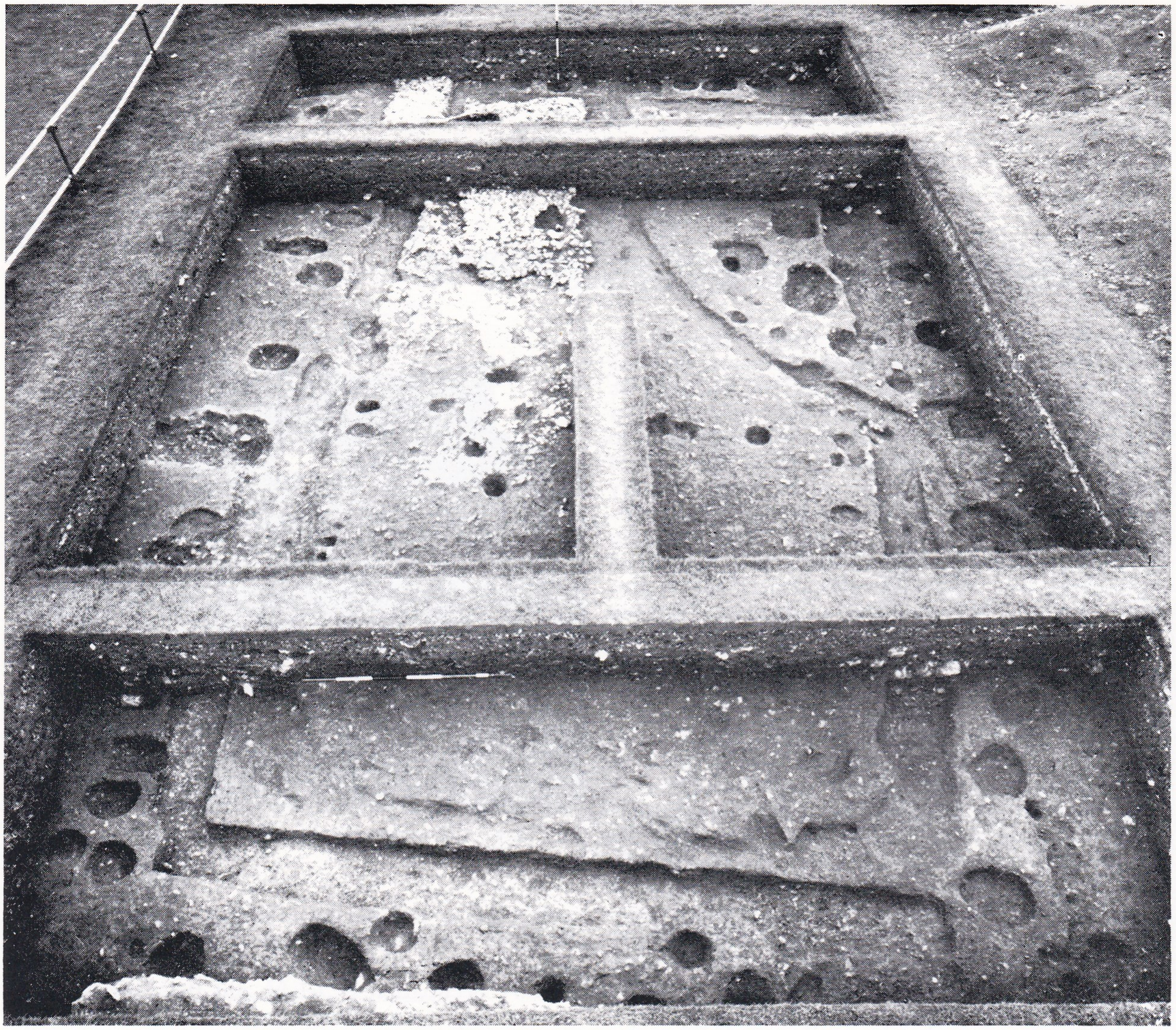


PLATE VI *The watergate probably of late Saxon origin.*

well allow it to have been constructed in the tenth century – a suggestion which will be referred to again below. A further question raised by the tenth-century occupation is, where did the garrison live? Presumably it was within the fort, but if so no trace of their buildings has yet come to light. This, however, is not surprising when it is remembered that only a small proportion of the interior has yet been excavated. Clearly, before firm conclusions can be reached much more digging will have to be done.

At the time of the Domesday Survey Portchester is recorded as possessing a hall. Fortunately the excavations carried out in 1965 and 1966 have begun to uncover a complex of eleventh-century buildings which may reasonably be equated with this entry (*fig. 5*). So far one building has been completely excavated, together with part of an adjacent structure. The complete building (*plate VII*) is rectangular, measuring 42 ft. by 23 ft. Its main walls were built of a series of vertical timbers placed in long foundation trenches, which were packed with rubble to keep the posts steady. Between the main verticals would have been an infilling of wattle-work daubed with a marly clay. Fragments of this daub showing the impressions of the wattle have been recovered from

[11] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1947), 262.
[12] R. M. Butler, 'A Roman Gateway at Portchester Castle?' *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. XXXV (1955), 219–222.



the general area of the walls. We know little of the roof, but it would presumably have been built of timber rafters covered with shingles, thatch or rushes. Now a roof of this span and weight would have exerted a considerable lateral thrust on the wall-top, forcing it to splay outwards. To counteract this, a series of 'buttress' posts had been erected along the outside of the walls, and a careful examination of the holes in which they were bedded showed that the posts originally leaned inwards to the building, thus giving support to the top member of the wall. This method of construction is well known, particularly in Northern Europe, where it can be shown to date back to early Saxon times.

Internally the building was divided into three rooms by partitions based on timber uprights. The large, or east, room was presumably a general storage or working area entered by doors which had been placed in the centres of the two long walls. The north door was protected from the weather by means of a porch. The two rooms in the western part of the building both seem to have been living-rooms, one being a small cubicle – possibly a bedroom – the other containing the hearth and also the remains of two timber uprights which may originally have been the side-members of steps leading to a loft. Another interesting feature of these living-rooms was that the exterior wall had been provided with an internal timber lining, which would have added to comfort by decreasing draughts and heat loss.

During its life the entire north-west corner of the building was reconstructed on a slightly different alignment, the new wall decreasing the size slightly by impinging upon the timbers of the internal lining. It was probably at about this time that some of the buttress posts were replaced. The fact that alterations of this nature took place at all suggests a considerable life for the structure, but the problems of dating will be returned to below.

The second building, part of which was excavated in 1966, was even more impressive in scale. It was 30 ft. wide and considerably more than 32 ft. long. Structurally it consisted simply of pairs of large timber piers, which would have supported the main

PLATE VII *General view of the* 1965 *excavation, showing the wall slots and buttress post-holes of the eleventh-century timber building.*

weight of the roof timbers, and, on either side, slots to take the wattle and daub walls. Several post-holes which could have belonged to buttress posts have also been found, but the interpretation of these must await further seasons' excavation. One, at least, of the aisle piers was replaced showing that the building remained in use for some time. The structural principles involved here were in fact similar to those employed for church architecture, but they do not, of course, necessarily imply a religious function – they simply provided a convenient system for roofing a wide area. Similar buildings have been found from time to time, but the closest British parallels to Portchester are provided by the late Saxon Palace buildings at Cheddar excavated a few years ago.[13] Here a series of aisled halls have been found dating from before the tenth century to the twelfth century.

The two buildings just described are clearly of the same complex; they were laid out in relation to each other, with corners almost abutting and the stratigraphical evidence shows that they were in use at approximately the same time. In front of them was an open area or yard within which, quite close to the porch of the first building, was a well. In 1966 it was largely excavated and shown to be circular, $5\frac{1}{2}$ft. in diameter and dug to a depth greater than 12 ft. (at the end of July in that year the water-table was at 10 ft. 7 ins. below the present surface). The filling produced a quantity of pottery of the type found elsewhere in the occupation levels belonging to the timber buildings, consisting basically of everted-rimmed cooking pots and shallow dishes, often decorated with a distinctive rilling of the surfaces or, less frequently, with impressed rouletted decoration. These features, though difficult to date in detail, both suggest a date somewhere in the eleventh century, which is supported by the discovery of a fragment of green-glazed pitcher, called Winchester ware, of a type known to have been current at this time.

It would seem, therefore, that in the eleventh century the walls of Portchester protected a manorial hall together with at least one associated building, its yard and its well. In all probability the buildings were of pre-Conquest origin, but how far back in time they went is beyond the scope of the present evidence to say. It is clear, however, that they continued in use into the Norman period, for just beyond the north-east corner of the first building was discovered a large rubbish pit containing, in addition to coarse pottery, three vessels probably of French origin. One, almost complete, is a small jug in a buff fabric decorated with applied strips impressed with grill-patterned stamps. The second was a fragment of a large storage jar in white ware decorated with splashes of red paint; the third was a small part of another large storage jar with stamped bands on the surface and coated with a thick green glaze. All are of well-known types current in the late eleventh century and were probably brought to this country with the flourishing wine trade which grew up at this time. The find is important, for it not only shows us that the hall continued in use into the Norman period but provides us with a glimpse of the habits and aspirations of the occupant.

The military potentialities of Portchester seem soon to have been realized by the Norman kings,[14] and early in the twelfth century the site passed into Royal hands. Documentary evidence for the early history of the castle is unfortunately sparse, but on architectural and stylistic grounds it is now generally assumed that the building of the castle began early in the twelfth century, by which time the timber hall had either fallen into disrepair or had been pulled down. The military work fell into two parts: first the consolidation of the existing defences, and second the addition of new military and domestic installations. There is no doubt that the old Roman wall was still substantially intact at this time and, if we were correct above, its Watergate had been rebuilt quite recently. The Norman builders therefore set about strengthening the rest of the circuit. The masonry lining the two Roman postern gates was ripped out and blocking walls inserted across the gaps. At the main west entrance what remained of the Roman Landgate was removed practically to its foundations and a new simple gatehouse was built, utilizing one of the Roman inturned walls (*fig. 4*). The gap left after the removal of the Roman gate was, however, too wide and a length of blocking wall had to be inserted between the Roman curtain wall and the new gate-house. The extent of this Norman work is still apparent from the outside, for the Medieval builders used a great deal of chalk in the core of their wall, whilst the Romans used flint. Lastly, the inner Roman ditch was cleared out together, possibly, with some parts of the outer ditch. In this way the old Roman defences were turned into

[13] P. A. Rhatz, 'The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar', *Medieval Archaeology*, vol. 6–7 (1962–3), 53–66.

[14] Detailed references for the facts presented in the following section were made available to me by Mr. David Baker who has recently completed a survey of the documents relating to Portchester.

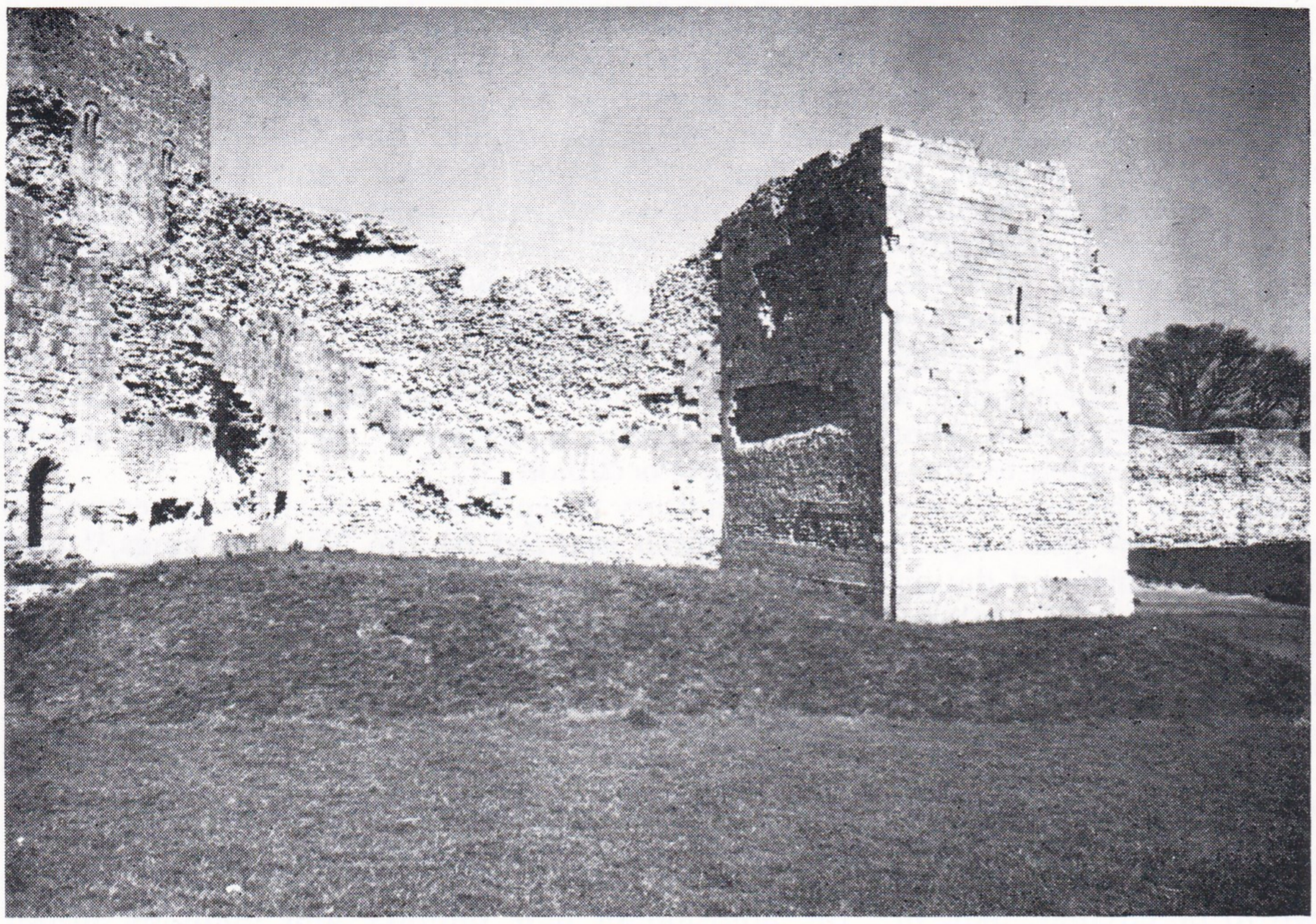


PLATE VIII
Norman bastion on the corner of the inner bailey.

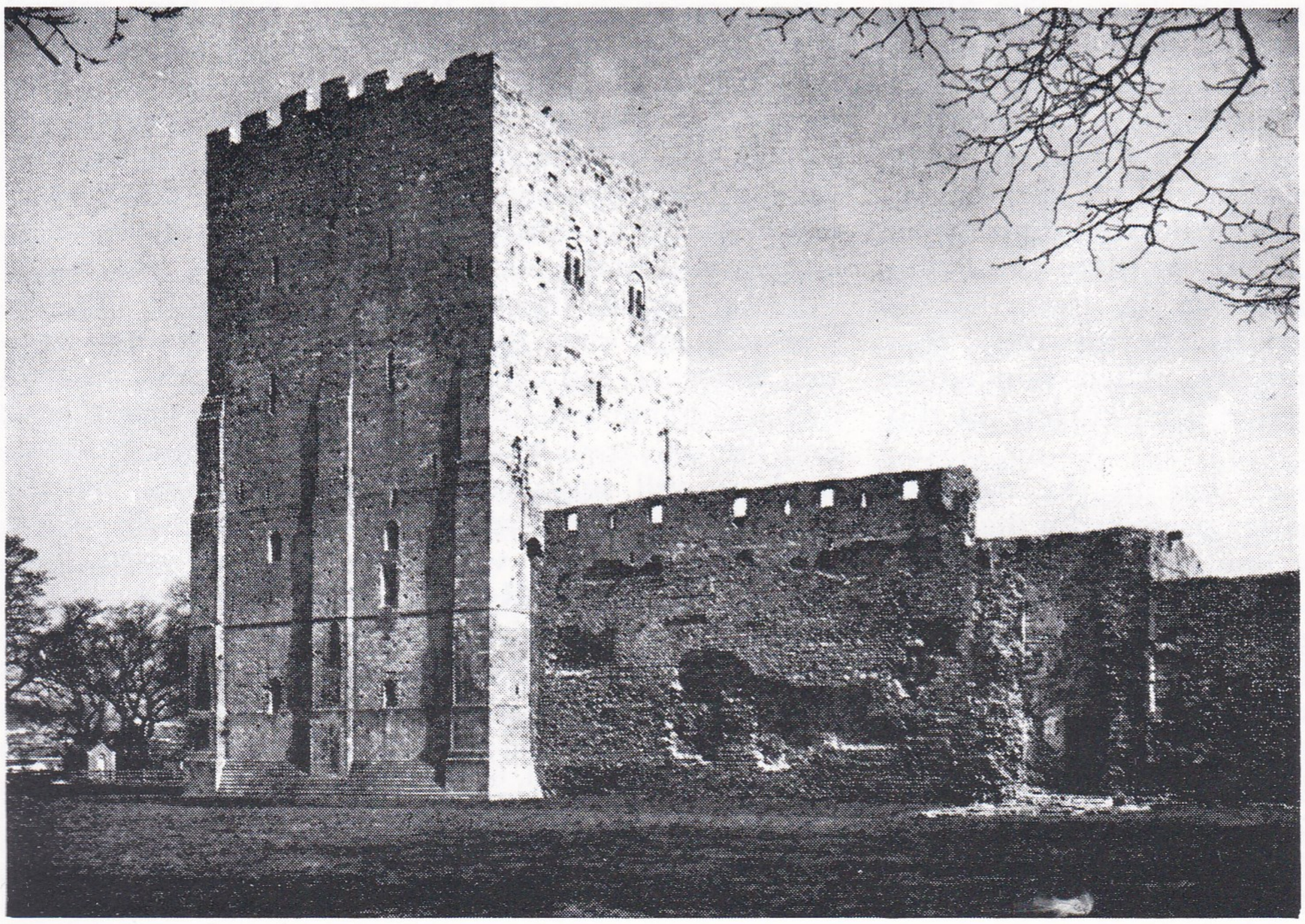


PLATE IX
The Norman keep.

the Outer Bailey of the new Medieval castle. The Roman walls, as we have said, were originally 10 ft. thick and were built of coursed flint rubble. The Norman builders evidently regarded such a thickness as unnecessary and, influenced no doubt by the labour involved in obtaining flint for the rubble cores of their new structures, they systematically robbed the inner faces of the curtain wall removing up to 4 ft. of its thickness. This much is clear partly from a study of the ground-surface from which the robbing begins, and partly from the fact that the lengths of Norman blocking wall are of exactly the same thickness as the reduced Roman wall.

The 9 acres of the Roman enclosure was too considerable an area to make totally secure, therefore an Inner Bailey was created in the north-west corner of the Roman enclosure, entered through one rectangular gatehouse in the south side. Around the outside of this new wall is a wide moat – now re-excavated and still flooded at high-tide. It has recently been suggested that the moat pre-dated the Inner Bailey wall and was originally backed by a palisade or earthwork. The masonry wall is certainly awkwardly placed in relation to the ditch, and it is hoped in the near future to test this interesting theory by excavation. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the new wall is its regularity of outline and the great projecting bastion on its south-east corner (*plate VIII*). Bastions were, of course, to become common in later Medieval military architecture, but this Portchester example must be one of the earliest and we can only suppose that the builders of the time adopted this novel idea from the Roman works they could see around them.

Within the Inner Bailey were constructed the main buildings of the fortress, of which the Great Tower is both the earliest and the most impressive (*plate IX*). In its early form it was simply a massive upper halled house of a type common in Norman England. As the name implies, the living-rooms were on the upper floor and were reached by a flight of steps which led from the courtyard surface to a doorway in the centre of the east side. Below the first-floor rooms were cellars for the storage of food and other commodities, reached by a spiral stone staircase which also led up to the roof. The first-floor hall with its fine south-facing windows, the large fire-place, the internal well and separate latrine, would have provided all the necessities of a comfortable, if somewhat austere, residence. Moreover it was secure. Attached to the east side of the keep, flanking the external staircase, were two other rooms: a small chapel to the south and a larger chamber to the north – perhaps for a priest or bailiff. These rooms, together with the Keep proper, would have provided the basic accommodation for the King and his retinue and staff. There may, in addition, have been timber stables and kitchens around the courtyard, but no trace of such structures has yet come to light.

The period from the middle of the twelfth century to the middle of the thirteenth century saw numerous repairs and additions (*fig. 6*). The Keep itself was increased in height and a dungeon was added in the space between the stairs and the chapel; later still the chapel was lengthened and its new east wall was continued south to become part of a further structure of so far undefined form. But in spite of the growth of the Keep block there seems to have been a centrifugal movement from this draughty tower to smaller isolated buildings, which began to be erected around the inside of the Inner Bailey wall. Three of these are known: against the north wall stood a substantial building of upper-halled form entered by a flight of steps at the west end, which also led to further rooms and passages built within the thickness of the Roman wall behind. In the south-west corner there survives now a small fragment of a wall arcade and a door belonging to a once elegant building, and in the south-east corner excavation has recently brought to light a kitchen with a separate room at the end leading into the corner bastion. Perhaps this is the 'kitchen and small chamber for the king's use' recorded to have been built in 1229. The impression gained from three alterations is that, whilst the strength of the structure was being maintained and even enhanced, the private accommodation was becoming more spacious and attention was being paid to comfort. This accords well with what is known of the use of the castle at this period, for its functions were two-fold – to provide a convenient strongpoint for the use of kings entering and leaving the country (and incidentally one in which troops could be amassed if necessary), and in more leisurely times to offer suitable accommodation for Royal parties engaged on hunting expeditions in the nearby Forest of Bere. But in spite of small sums of money spent on the upkeep of the fabric, the defences were at no time extensively remodelled or kept in tune with rapidly developing military needs, in fact by the second half of the thirteenth century the castle had become hopelessly outdated. The residential buildings were no better cared for and indeed a survey made in 1274 described them as antiquated, ruined and unsuitable for residence.

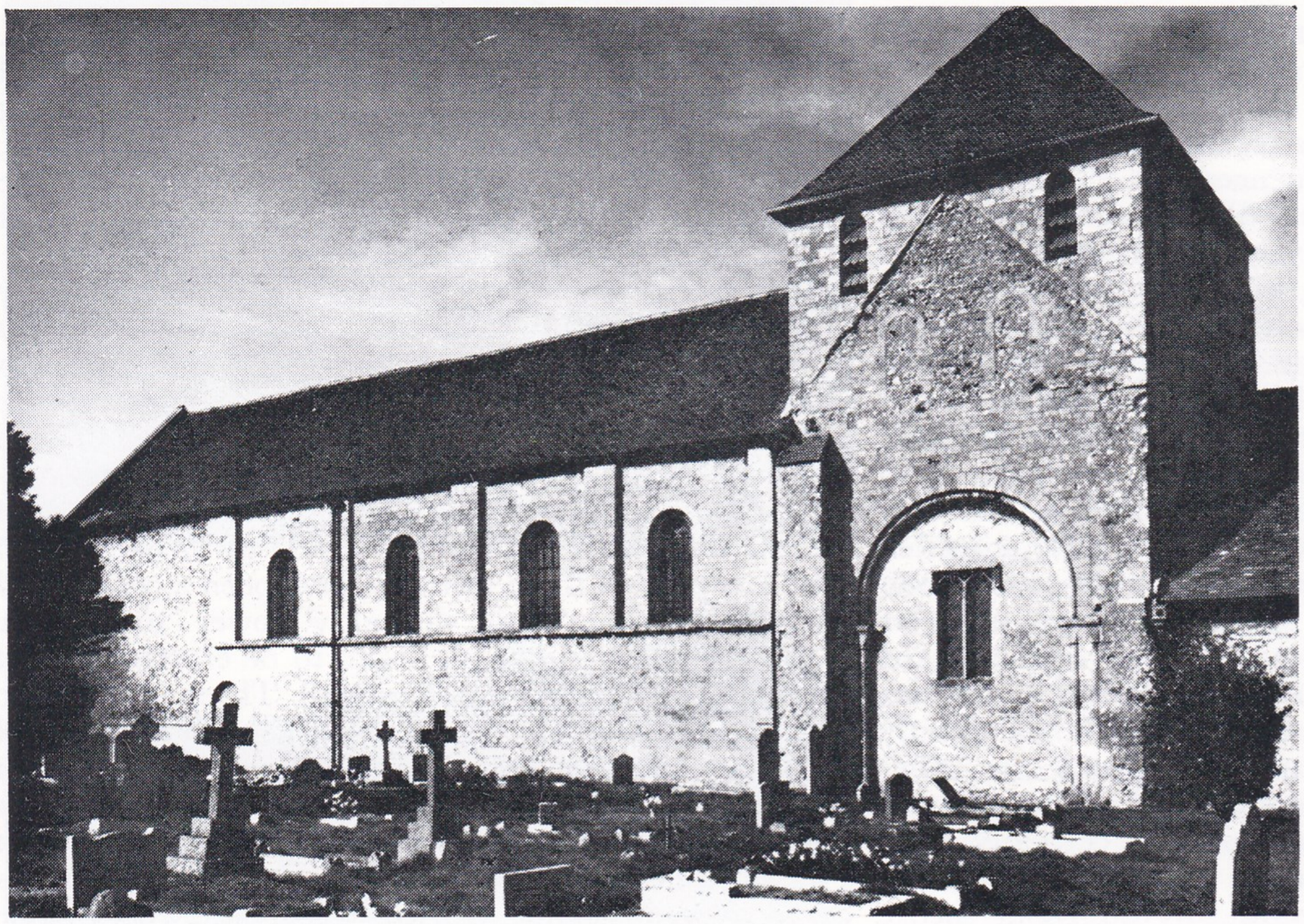


PLATE X
South wall of the priory church ; the site of the west range, south transept and north cloister can be clearly seen.

PLATE XI
Thirteenth-century cesspit.

So far only the buildings of the Inner Bailey have been considered, but the Outer Bailey must also have been occupied in one form or another. All that is now visible is the fine church in the south-east corner of the walled area, built in the period following 1133 as the church of a small Augustinian Priory (*plate X*). Within 20 years the monks had moved to a new site at Southwick – to share a site with Norman Royalty must have been too much for them! Twenty years is a short time, but even so the conventual building had been largely completed for the latrine shafts from the reredorter still survive, cut through the Roman wall. The church continued in use, but the domestic ranges would have provided an excellent quarry for building material particularly during the period of intensive building activity in the late twelfth century. The church is surrounded now by a modern cemetery, which would have largely destroyed all traces of the monastic establishment, but it is unlikely that its original twelfth-century burial ground lay so close. The recent excavations west of the church have uncovered a small group of human burials which can be shown to post-date the Conquest-period timber hall, and which would seem to be of twelfth-century date. Presumably they were part of the monastic burial ground. If so, the skeletal material will provide valuable information about the inhabitants and the extent of the cemetery when defined may offer some indication of twelfth-century mortality rate.

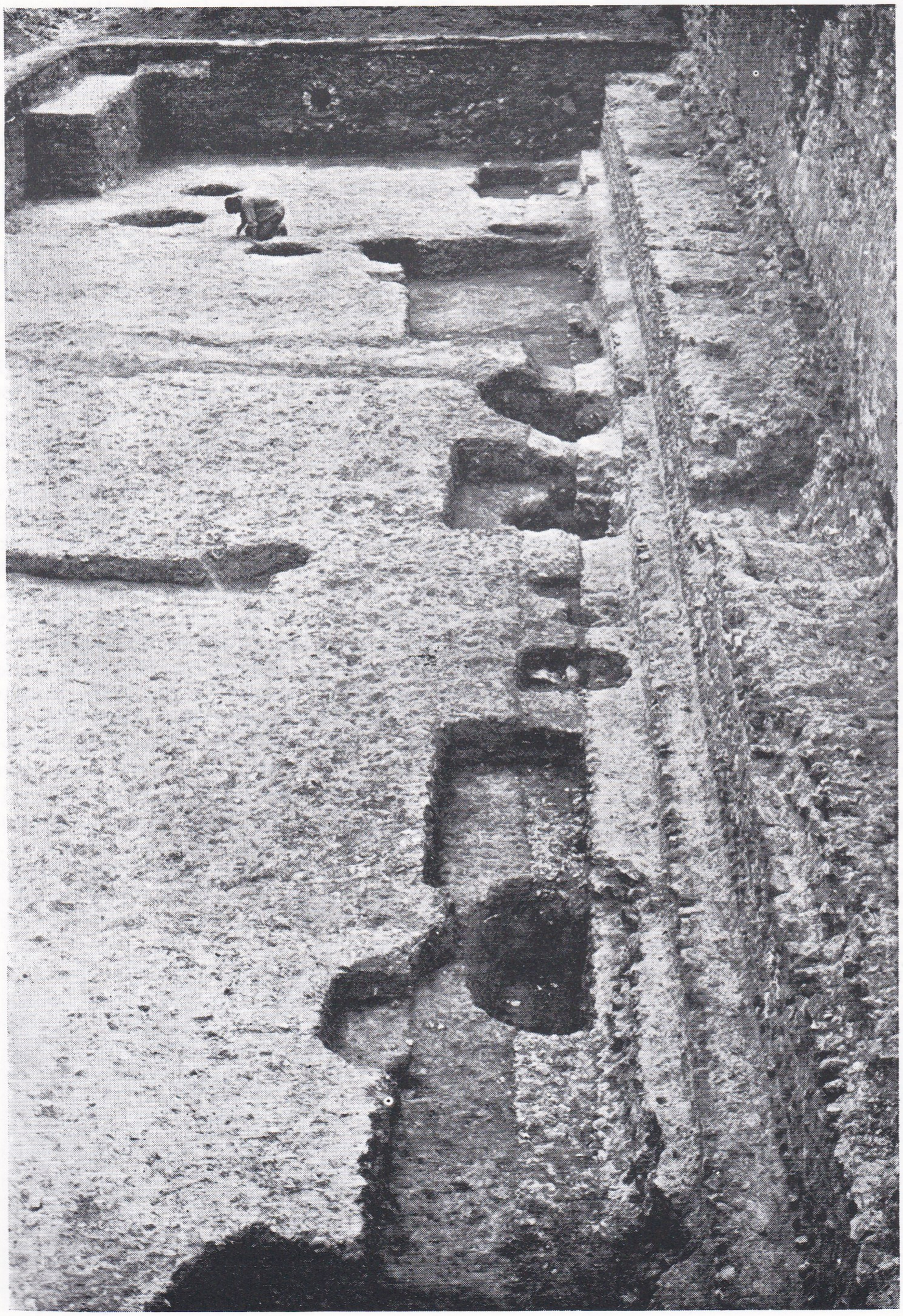
The Outer Bailey protected several other buildings whose functions are unknown. On both sides of the Watergate, for example, substantial masonry structures have been discovered belonging to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the one to the north of the gate was used to store coal. In the south-west area, quite close to the cemetery, part of a large timber bulding, associated with a curving palisade, came to light recently in the excavations. There must be many others still to be discovered such as one referred to in the documentary evidence as the 'King's mill', which was rebuilt at a cost of £22 11s., following an order issued in May 1289. The future excavations will quite possibly show that the Outer Bailey was densely built up, but much more digging will need to be carried out before anything like a complete plan can be produced. One further detail may be added – a certain order and neatness prevailed: in the area of 4,000 sq. ft. excavated so far in the south-west quarter, twelfth- and thirteenth-century rubbish was noticeably sparse, and only one rubbish pit of this date was found. In contrast, the 1961 excavation against the inner face of the west wall produced a whole series of pits which had been neatly laid out in a row along the wall-face (*plates XI and XII*). This speaks of a certain regimentation, which would have been very necessary if the site was not to deteriorate into squalor and filth.

The early fourteenth century saw a new impetus in building activity at the castle, due largely to the demands of Edward II for a secure retreat. Not surprisingly, much of the total expenditure of this period was used in the consolidation and strengthening of the defences, but substantial sums were paid out for the re-roofing and repair of various chambers. It has been estimated that the total bill for the period 1320–1326 amounted to more than £1,000. The threat of French raids at the beginning of the Hundred Years War encouraged further activity which was almost certainly restricted to putting the outer defensive circuit into good order, lest the French should land and devastate the castle as they had done at Portsmouth and Southampton in 1338. It was at this time (1336–7) that work on an outer earthern defence is mentioned, presumably referring to the earthwork which cuts off the promontory upon which the castle stands. This need imply only that an existing earthwork was repaired, it does not necessarily mean that it was actually constructed at this time. Th possibility therefore remains that this defensive circuit dates back to a more remote period, perhaps to the tenth century as suggested above. The nature of the refurbishing at present remains unknown but it seems tolerably certain that the ditch fronting the earthwork was re-cut. Now references to rebuilding in 1335 and 1341 describe inroads made by the sea and it is thought that in this period there was a relative rise in sea-level. The newly-cut, or at least re-cut, outer ditch would certainly have been a water-filled moat, and thus the castle would have been entirely surrounded by an outer barrier of water.

The military importance of Portchester declined rapidly during the fourteenth century, due largely to the growth of the naval establishment at Portsmouth, and even though it continued to be garrisonned against the French it is fair to say that by the end of the century the castle had become obsolete as a military installation. But Richard II's interest in the site ensured that after peace with France in 1396 Portchester continued to be used, no longer as a fort but as a royal residence. To fit it for this function, a completely new suite of domestic buildings was erected around the walls of the Inner Bailey, replacing the earlier agglomeration (*fig. 7*). This new work, which consisted of the Great Hall (*plate XIII*), kitchen

PLATE XII

Rubbish pits of Medieval and later date dug along the inside face of the west wall.



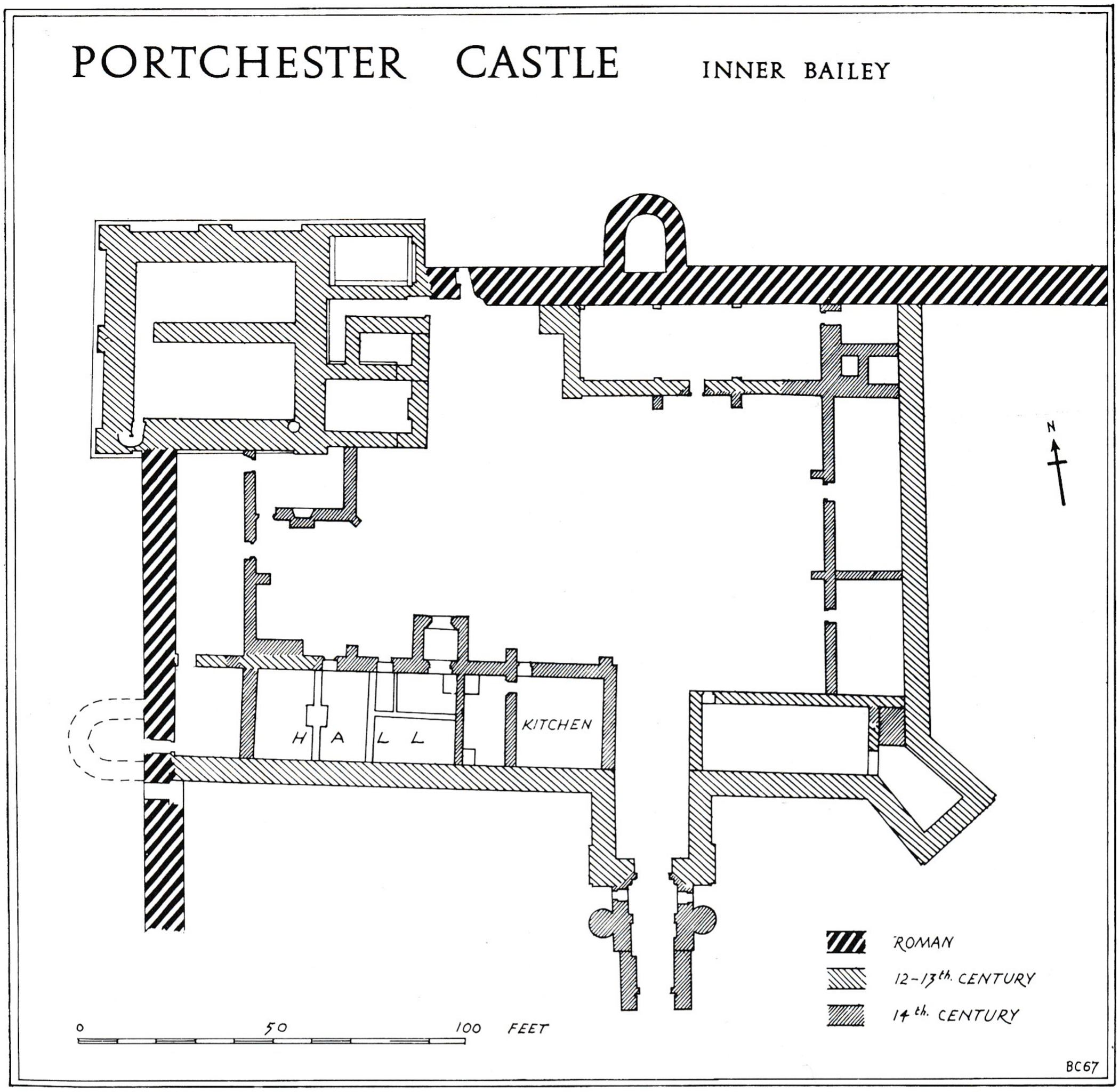


FIG 7

and private apartments, still an impressive feature of the monument, was completed between 1396 and 1399 at a cost of over £1,700. The contemporary building records provide a vivid idea of the enormous activity involved: masons, carpenters, tilers, plumbers and white-washers are all mentioned, and for one period some of them had to work at night by the light of candles. The amount of building material required was considerable and expensive. Secondhand lead for the roof was bought from Mere castle in Wiltshire, but the glass with painted heraldic designs used in the windows of the hall seems to have been new. In addition to this, stone arrived by ship from Beer in Devon and Bembridge and Bonchurch in the Isle of Wight, in such quantities that a new wharf had to be built to facilitate the unloading. Like Edward II, Richard regarded Portchester as a place of safety for himself against dissident elements and it is therefore hardly surprising that during his reign the defences were again repaired and the main gates enlarged to their final form.

Richard was deposed before he could make use of his modernized palace, and gradually through lack of use and care deterioration set in. By 1441 it was reported to be ruinous and feeble, and 9 years later it was described as in great ruin, decay and dilapidation with broken gates and fallen towers. Thus throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the fabric, though occasionally patched up, was allowed to disintegrate, but the site still had its uses and in the period 1521–7 Henry VIII paid £400 for the building of a great naval store-house within the walls. It is reasonably certain that this was the buttressed building which can still be seen as a parched mark in the grass in the south-west corner of the fort measuring 36 ft. by 245 ft. But even this was not to last, for in 1585 we hear that it had been dismantled and superseded by a similar structure already existing in the rapidly growing garrison town of Portsmouth. Thus by the end of the sixteenth century the military and naval functions of Portchester had been completely superseded by Portsmouth, and it was never to regain

PLATE XIII
Richard II's hall.

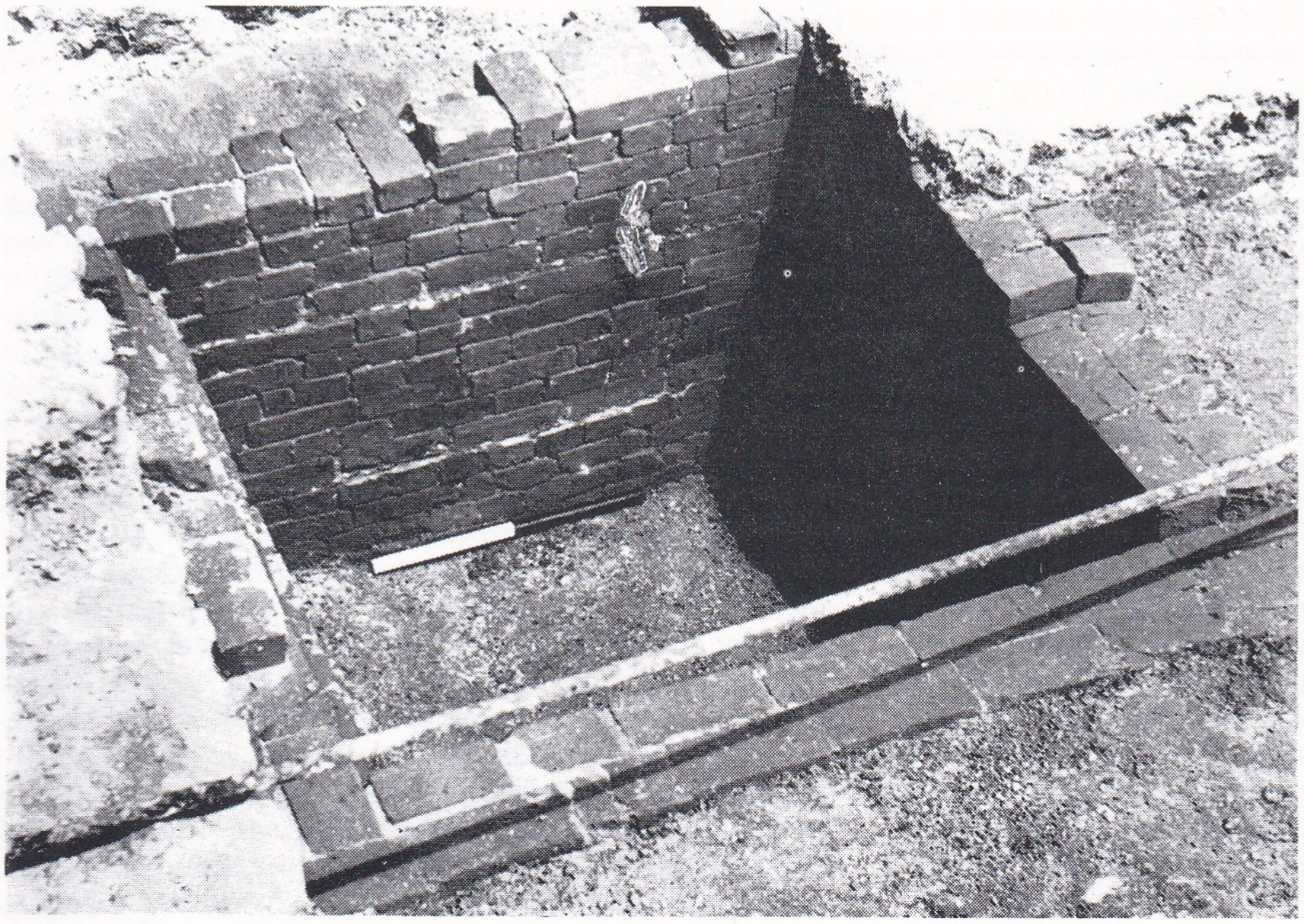


PLATE XIV
Eighteenth-century cesspit.

its former position. The site still continued in royal hands, and indeed during the reign of James I some modernization of the domestic buildings took place, but eventually in 1632 it was sold to a private owner.

The obsolete and by now derelict structure was of very limited use. But war first with the Dutch in the late seventeenth century, and later sporadically throughout the eighteenth century with the French, presented a new problem – namely the housing of prisoners, and again Portchester Castle was brought back into service, this time as a State prison – a function for which its Roman and Norman defences suited it well. Much remains of this period of activity: the names carved by the prisoners, and the brickwork strengthening the ancient masonry are the most obvious traces, but excavation has produced evidence of barrack buildings with their well-built latrines (*plate XII*) and complex network of sewers, together with many details of daily life: buttons from the prisoners' uniforms, their clay pipes and fragments of worked bone from objects and models which they made to while away their confinement. Apart from occasional outbreaks of cholera and smallpox, which spread rapidly through the congested prison, at one time housing 5,000 souls, Portchester was a successful prison. Indeed, by as late as 1821 Paterson describes it as still of 'sufficient preservation to be appropriated for the purposes of a military prison', but his advice was not taken. Finally, in 1855, the proposal that it should become a military hospital was mercifully quashed on the reasonable grounds that 'there could scarcely be chosen a less desirable site'.

Thus, after 1,500 years of service, Portchester was allowed gracefully to retire. It is now a place of recreation, relaxation and study, visited yearly by thousands of people in the pursuance of these purposes. Lying as it does in the midst of an area of cluttered urban development, it has immeasurable value and must, with its immediate environment, be protected at all costs. I know of no place with so rich a feeling of peace and dignity as Portchester Castle on an early morning in summer.

Bibliography

Portchester Castle, Hampshire (1965). S. E. RIGOLD.
This is the official guide to the castle, produced by the Ministry of Public Building and Works. It contains an up-to-date survey of the castle's history, together with a consideration of its architecture. The 1965 edition replaces the earlier guide of the same name.

The History of the King's Works, vol. 1 (1963), pp. 783–792. H. COLVIN.
A detailed summary of the history of Portchester from 1066–1485. It contains full references to the original documents.

Victoria County History of Hampshire, vol. 3 (1908), pp. 151–161.
This work presents a valuable description of the history of the castle from Medieval times. For the early period it is to a large extent superceded by *The History of the King's Works*, and little was known of the architectural development of the Medieval castle at the time of its publication, but even so for the period from 1485 it is still a basic work.

Victoria County History of Hampshire, vol. 1 (1900), pp. 328–330.
In this short section Haverfield gives the first adequate survey of the Roman fort. It has now been rendered out of date by the current excavations.

Excavations at Portchester Castle, Hants, 1961–3, Antiquaries Journal, XLIII, pp. 218–227. B. CUNLIFFE.

Excavations at Portchester Castle, Hants, 1963–5, Antiquaries Journal, XLVI, pp. 39–49. B. CUNLIFFE

These two short interim reports summarize the results of the excavations up to Easter 1965. It is hoped that interim reports of this kind will be published at regular intervals until the excavation has been completed. The final report, including a definitive account of the history and architecture of the castle as well as the archaeology, will be produced as a monograph as soon after the final excavation as possible.

The above list contains the principal modern works concerned with the castle. Many others exist, for example: C. H. Hartshorne, 'On the History and Architecture of Portchester Castle', *Proc. of the Archaeological Institute* (1845); Lt.-Col. J. H. Cooke, *Portchester Castle, its Romance in Tradition and History* (1928); Anon., *Portchester Castle, its Origin, History and Antiquities Interspersed with Anecdotes of its Occupation during the Late French Wars* (1845). These and the many like them, sometimes incorrect and frequently fanciful, are of interest only to those concerned with the development of antiquarian thought.

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2. *History of the Police of Portsmouth* by James Cramer, 1967 (Illus.), *Reprinted* 1983.
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